

ARLINGTON POST OFFICE
3118 N. Washington Boulevard
Arlington County
Virginia

HABS VA-1433
VA-1433

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ARLINGTON POST OFFICE

HABS No. VA-1433

Location: 3118 North Washington Boulevard, in the Clarendon neighborhood of Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia.

The coordinates for the Arlington Post Office are 38.885756N, 77.095933W; these were obtained using Google Earth in August 2010 and, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Description: The one-story, pentagon-shaped building is made of brick and is constructed on a triangular-shaped, corner lot. It faces the intersection of North Washington Boulevard and North Hudson Street and the front façade is extended toward this intersection by the portico, flagpole, and small planting bed. The northwest (front) façade is three bays across, with a beltcourse. A domed portico fronts the center bay and entrance. The dome is supported by four fluted piers made of limestone. Granite steps double as the foundation for the portico. Incised lettering "United States Post Office" ornaments an otherwise plain frieze. Beneath the portico is the entrance vestibule; the entry doors are glazed, double doors made of aluminum. Above the doors is a four-light transom and, above that, a modeled bronze eagle. To either side of the entrance is a tripartite window placed within a shallow arch. Doric pilasters form the surrounds. The central glazing of these tripartite windows has six-over-six lights and is flanked by glazing arranged two-over-two. The street elevations are simpler, and are punctuated by inset, single-hung windows glazed with six-over-six lights. The interior is notable for its light fixtures as well as the murals by Auriel Bessemer.

History: The construction of the Arlington Post Office in 1937 marked the consolidation of postal services in the county and this shift in civic governance provided a communal locus in lieu of a city center for the county's dispersed neighborhoods. By the 1930s Clarendon had become the county's commercial core and it was chosen as the site for the central post office. The design was carried out by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury and Louis Simon, the Supervising Architect at the time, was present at the cornerstone laying ceremony in May 1937. The building's artistic program was also under the auspices of the Treasury Department, specifically the Section of Fine Arts under the supervision of Edward B. Rowan. It was Rowan who wrote to the artist Auriel Bessemer about the murals. These were completed in 1939, two years after the building opened.

Architecturally the building references early American architecture, specifically the Georgian and Federal-period structures in Alexandria and Washington, DC, with its classical elements and imposing portico as well as by the materials, the brick and limestone, used in its construction. However, the expression of

Georgian-Revival architecture exhibited in the building's form is one of its era, stylized and simplified, rather than a full embrace of the eighteenth-century idiom. This streamlined quality helped the post office relate architecturally to the other buildings in Clarendon that were designed according to modern, contemporary principles and simultaneously served to distinguish it as a site of importance.

Sources: Betty Bird, "Arlington Post Office," Nomination June 1985, National Register for Historic Places, National Park Service.

Site visit, 2010.



Figure 1. View of the northwest (front) façade, 2010.